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ABSTRACT

This guide for educators presents an educational continuum encompassing traditional approaches to developmentally appropriate practice. Children, parents, teachers, and the classroom are discussed in terms of resources they provide for the learning experience and the movement towards developmentally appropriate practice. For example, children can share experiences and interests; parents can offer research data about their children, years of experience, and unique combinations of interests and skills; teachers have a body of knowledge and the teaching skills needed to use that knowledge; and the classroom contains accessible materials for spontaneous use and exploration. The continuum of teacher development is presented in terms of philosophy, the environment, instructional strategies, role of the teacher, and classroom management. The role of the administrator is also described as a continuum. The evaluation process in the developmentally appropriate programs focuses on the whole child and can use many different tools. The Maine Educational Assessment is one example of a developmental approach to testing at the state level. Several full-page line-drawings illustrate the booklet. (RJC)

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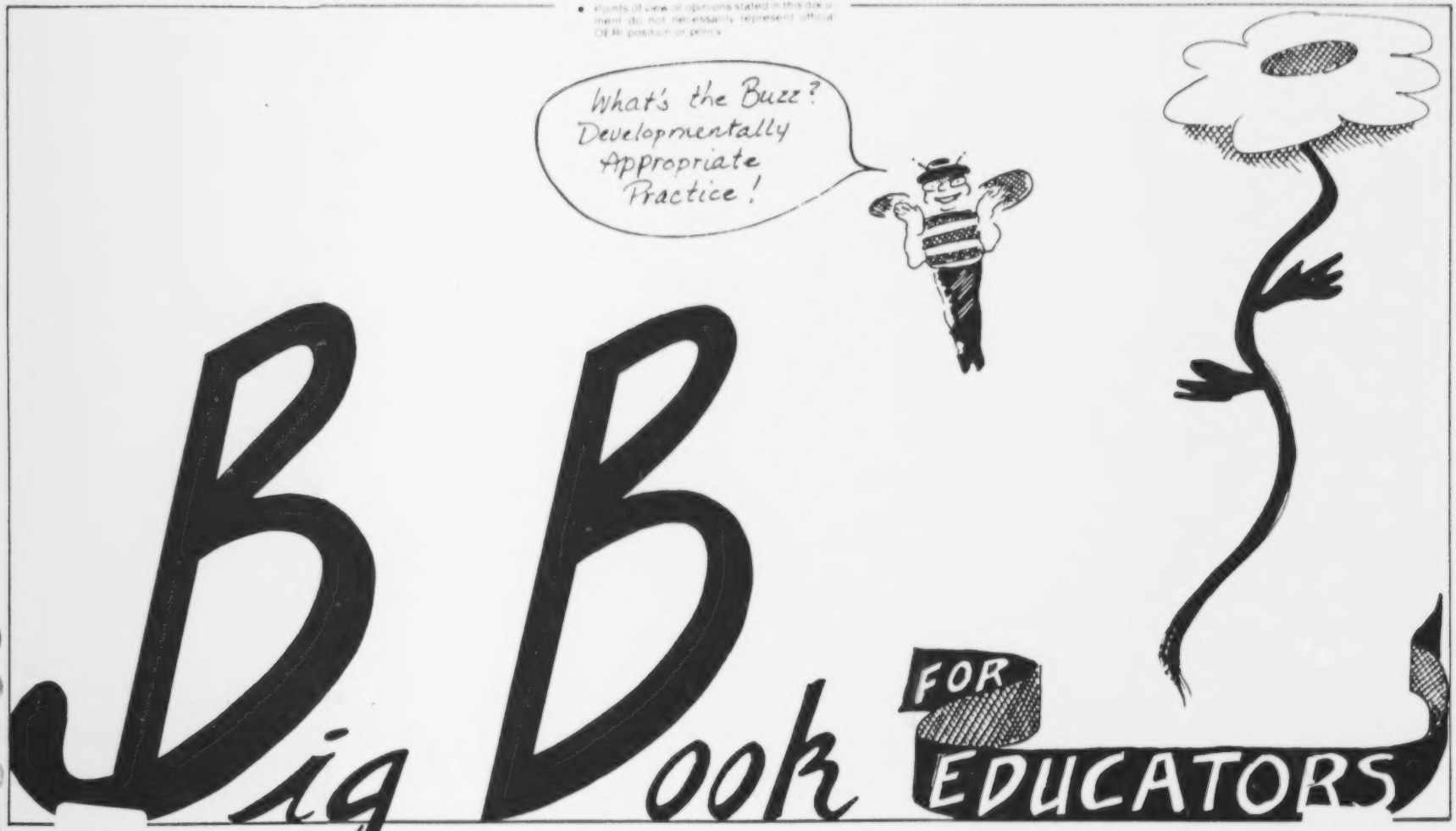

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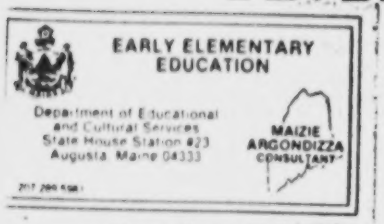
DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE:
A GUIDE TO CHANGE



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THE RATIONALE

Independent bodies of research in such fields as cognitive learning, language acquisition, social context, cooperative learning and literacy support the movement toward developmentally appropriate practice. In fact, the recent position statement published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (January, 1988) entitled "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Primary Grades Serving 5-Through 8-Year Olds" has focused attention on common practices in primary classrooms throughout the United States. It identifies those practices which are acceptable and those which are unacceptable. This guide attempts to help educators make transitions.

We need to recognize that change itself is a developmental process, one that occurs at our own pace and often with some anxiety. There is security in doing things the way we have always done them, and change can be threatening. This process requires us to examine the ways in which young children learn. They learn through:

* interaction with other children,
* interaction with and modeling by adults,
* problem-solving with real objects, and
* play.

The next step is to examine our own teaching strategies. Do they align with and reflect what we know about how children learn? With many of us, they do not. It is probably safe to say that the vast majority of us learned to teach in a traditional model, while current research shows us that children learn best in a developmental model. The result is a mismatch between our knowledge base and our classroom practices.

The following sections will help us to recognize children, parents and ourselves as resources, how to put the information together and how to use the interests of children to enhance their learning. Then we will look at a continuum that describes the development of educators and use it to identify where each of us is presently functioning. Determining the direction we wish to take will help move us along in the change process. We will discuss evaluation and how that fits into the planning and implementation of a developmentally appropriate classroom.

One question we need to continually ask ourselves is this: "Does this activity reflect how children learn?"

TOWARD DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

CHANGE AS A PROCESS

Change as it relates to developmentally-appropriate practices is not limited to specific curriculum issues but begins as an internal, personalized process. Research has identified specific components that are present in the change process:

1. Change is a process not an event.
2. Change is accomplished by individuals.
3. Change is a highly personal experience.
4. Change involves developmental growth.
5. Change is best understood in operational terms.
6. The focus of innovation should be with individuals, the innovation and the context. (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, Hall, 1987)

There are several stages we go through in the change process. Each of us moves through this process at our own rate, so that we are usually at different places at different times. It would be much simpler if we could all be at the same place at the same time, but as with children, it does not happen that way. By recognizing where we and others are in the process, we can provide mutual support during a time of disequilibrium.

We can see a spiral pattern of stages that may emerge as follows:

- Impetus to change occurs when we recognize that our present practices do not meet the needs of children or reflect how children learn.

- We gather information by reading journals, attending workshops, visiting other classrooms.

- We take the risk of questioning present practices both privately and publicly. Support groups may help this process as we gain ownership.

- Tension is created. We begin experimenting with classroom practices based on newly-acquired information. This is a testing time; our practices may appear inconsistent with the changing belief system.

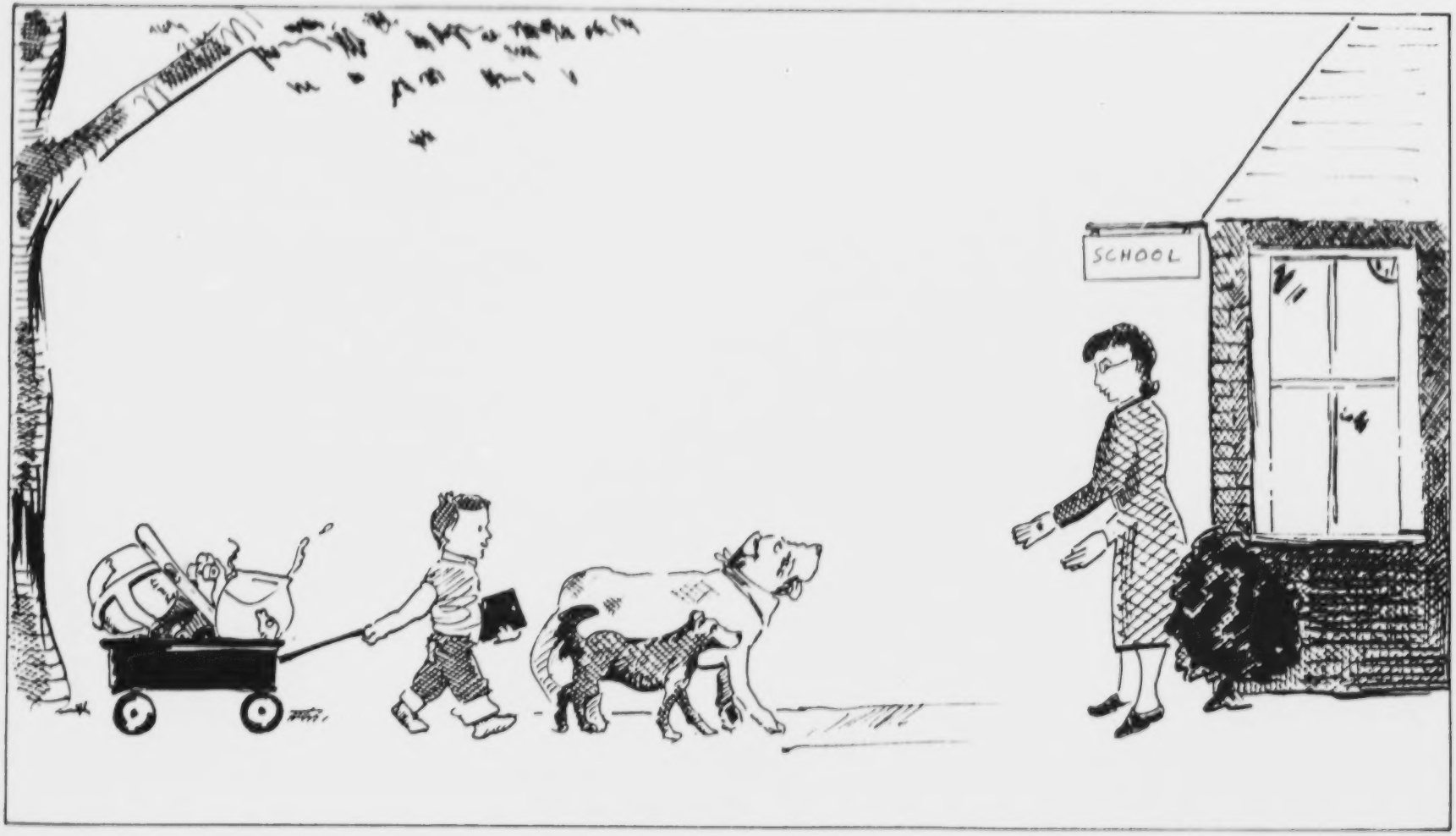
- We internalize the changing belief system and reach equilibrium as our practice matches our philosophy.

Change is an on-going process and as life-long learners, we are motivated to act upon our evolving beliefs. As we continue to heighten our awareness, assimilate current research and evaluate our practices, we cycle through the spiral with a different set of issues.

THE CHILD AS RESOURCE

Children arrive at the classroom door filled with experiences and interests they cannot wait to share. They are supported by a lifetime of interpersonal relationships from which they will predict how each new setting will feel and are imbued with an innate curiosity ready to devour whatever the school environment offers.

Not only do children bring concrete objects such as toys, games, living creatures, notes from grandparents and other treasures, but also a recognition of symbols in the environment such as family names, street signs, house numbers and commercial products. These may be untapped resources upon which to build a foundation for new knowledge.



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THE PARENT AS RESOURCE

Parents arrive at the classroom door equipped with volumes of research data about their own children and filled with years of life experiences from which they have developed unique combinations of interests and skills. They are fortified with an ongoing supply of energy to supplement the teacher's own resources.

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THE TEACHER AS RESOURCE

The teacher arrives at the classroom door equipped with a body of knowledge and with teaching skills to utilize that knowledge. In addition, the teacher has a reservoir of interests, experiences and interpersonal relationships to bring to the classroom and is motivated by a natural love for young children.

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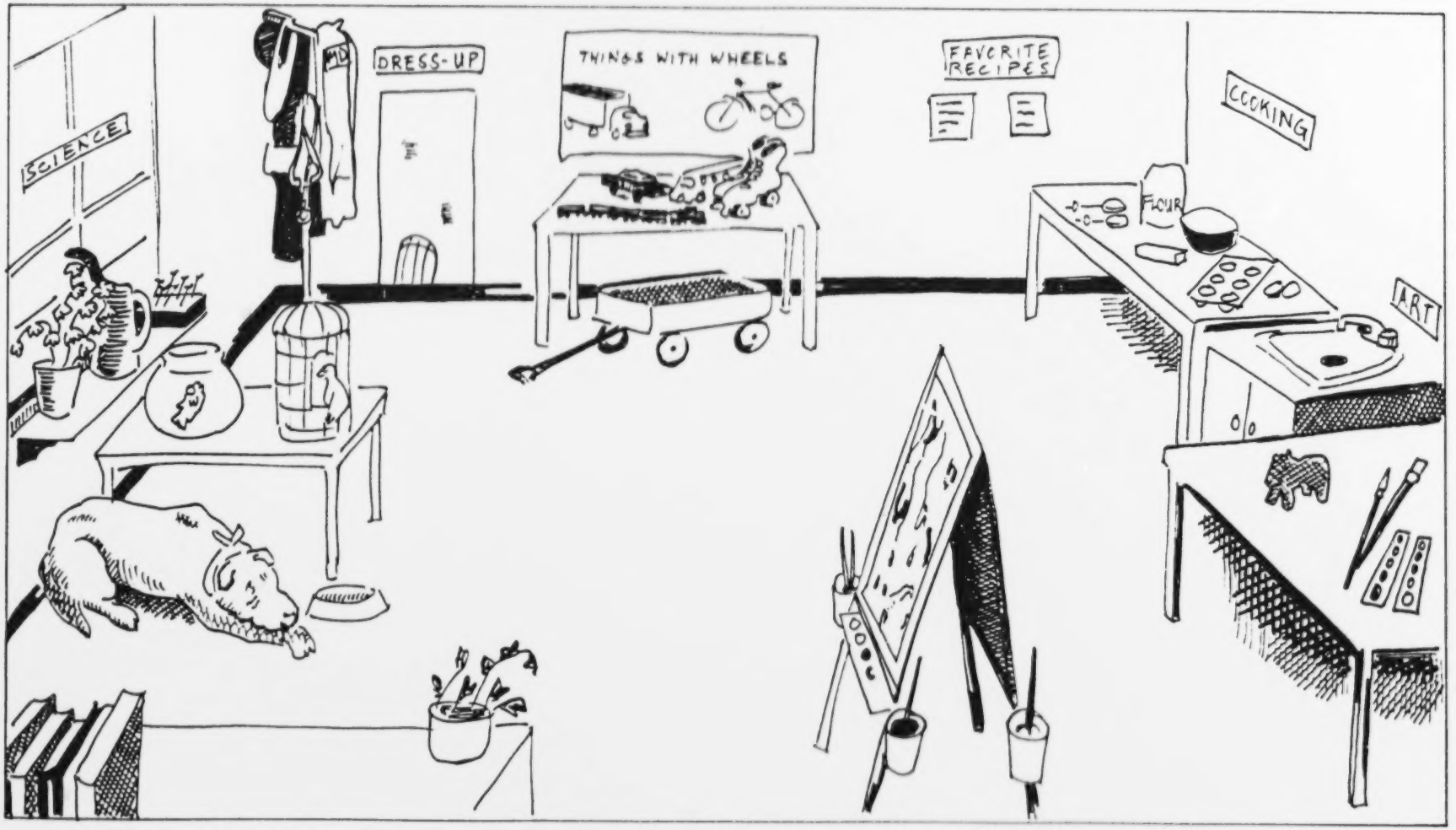
THE CLASSROOM

Because children move from the concrete to the symbolic, the classroom is arranged with accessible materials for spontaneous use and exploration. These materials are supplied by children, parents, community and teacher and reflect child-generated themes. Materials will vary from classroom to classroom because interests will vary, and materials reflect what is interesting and available.


SCIENCE
DRESS-UP
THINGS WITH WHEELS
FAVORITE RECIPES
COOKING
FLOUR
ART

THE CONTINUUM

The continuum which appears on the following pages is designed to help educators define the course along which we move in the change process. This continuum looks at philosophy, the environment, instructional strategies, the role of the teacher, classroom management and the role of the administrator. There may be others that are not included which you may wish to add. Use this as a working guide to help you determine where you are functioning in each of these areas. You will find that you are at varying places along the continuum. You may also find that your philosophy is further along on the continuum than are your practices. Or you may find yourself vacillating between two of the "benchmarks" on a given continuum. This is not surprising in light of the way we go through the change process, discussed earlier. Above all, trust yourself, gather information, take the risk, go through the apprehension, gain confidence, then move ahead and experience the rewards of continued growth.

PHILOSOPHY

Outside experts are trusted to provide curriculum for each level of skills.	Teacher is trusted to recognize needs and plan course of study.	Teacher is trusted to recognize needs; children help to plan course of action.	Children are trusted to recognize own needs and plan own study.
Teacher has control of student learning.	Teacher is a facilitator, provider of appropriate activities.	Teacher is a questioner and guide in discovery, an equal partner in a democratic classroom.	
Learning is equated with mastering skills which are predetermined by the curriculum.	The learner is active, a discoverer of knowledge.	The learner constructs own knowledge as a result of interaction with the environment.	
The learner is a receiver of information passed on by the teacher.	Learning is planned with developmental stages in mind.	Learning is not only an end in itself, but is also continually applied to real-life situations.	
Teacher is viewed as a transmitter of information.	Teacher is a classroom manager.	Teacher uses knowledge and skills to facilitate the learning process.	
Learning begins with the teaching of discrete parts.	Learning begins with the teaching of discrete parts, builds toward understanding of the whole.	Learning begins with whole concept, then moves to discrete parts.	Learning moves from understanding the whole to student recognition of need for learning discrete parts.
Build curriculum first, then fit children into curriculum.	Use interests of children to make set curriculum more meaningful.	Use needs and interests of children to build curriculum.	Children actively participate in building curriculum, based on their interests and needs.
Play is viewed as an outlet; is restricted to time after work is done.	Play is used with directed objects to support the learning process.	Play is viewed as necessary to social and emotional growth.	Play is viewed as essential means through which learning takes place.
Social interaction has less importance than "time on task."	There is provision for social interaction during specified times.	Social skills are emphasized and viewed as life issue.	

THE ENVIRONMENT

Desks are for individual use, may be arranged in rows or a U-shape. Social interaction is minimized by room arrangement.	Desks are clustered, learning centers are located around perimeter of room.	Room is arranged in learning centers, with teacher-selected materials and tasks, shared furniture.	Teacher/students organize environment to facilitate social interaction and student-initiated activities.
Teacher's desk is focal point.	Teacher's desk moves to less conspicuous area.	Teacher's desk may give way to flexible area to be used for student conferencing, parent conferencing, record keeping. Area might be equipped with file cabinet, comfortable chairs and shelves for professional resources.	
Room remains much the same throughout the year; may be changed for variety.	Children may help teacher plan room changes during the year.	Room arrangement and traffic patterns reflect the diverse developmental needs of children.	
Basal textbooks, paper/pencil tasks are predominately used. Distribution is controlled by the teacher.	Concrete materials available; distribution controlled by the teacher.	Concrete materials used as needed, desired by children to assist in problem-solving.	Children use concrete materials to assist in problem-solving and to create problems for solving.
Room is prepared with commercial or teacher-made displays for children's arrival.	Teacher has some bulletin boards prepared; reserves space for children's own work.	Wall space may be empty when children arrive; children help plan spaces and displays of their work.	

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Teacher directed and planned.	Teacher plans, but children's interests are included in planning.	Children have equal input in planning (i.e. through webbing.)	Children select areas of interest and recognize skills they need to acquire.
Skills-based, time specified for each content area.	Goals-based; thematic units may be used in an interdisciplinary approach.		Interest-driven study with skills addressed as needed.
Begin with teaching parts (discrete skills) and build toward whole (concept).		Begin with whole concept; break into parts as skills acquisition is needed.	
Predominately basals, paper and pencil tasks.	Language experience approach is used.		Individualized or small group instruction. Use child's own language to build skills.
Predominately whole group instruction.	Whole group and small group instruction.		Small group and individual instruction/conferencing as well as whole group instruction.
Students work by themselves.	Interaction provided for at specified times.		Interaction and cooperative problem-solving encouraged.
Library books may be read at specified times or when work is finished.	Library books are used to supplement the basal readers.		Reading instruction is based on children's literature and children's own writing.
Competition among children is used to motivate. Extrinsic rewards (i.e. stickers and prizes) are given.	Teacher looks for ways to minimize competition, foster cooperation.		Competition with oneself is focus so that rewards become intrinsic. Learning is its own reward.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Corrector - student errors are viewed as unacceptable. Errors reduce grades.	Errors are viewed as part of the learning process.	Errors are examined and used as guide to gaining new knowledge. →
Imparter of knowledge.		Facilitator of the learning process. →
Planbook is prepared several days in advance of lesson; teacher strives to adhere to it.	Planbook reflects goals and objectives with flexibility for activities.	Planbook reflects long-term goals and webbing of ideas generated by children. →

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Discipline is controlled and monitored by teacher.	Children begin to assume some responsibility for their own behavior.	Children practice self-discipline. Rules are established by the class and are followed by all. Children help/teach each other. →
No choices provided. Everyone is required to complete specified activities.	Few choices provided, often after work is completed.	Many choices provided. Children not only choose center but also the activity for that center. →
Conflict is settled by the teacher.		Conflict resolution skills are learned and practiced by the children. →

Ideally, administrators and teachers work collaboratively to build a school program which supports developmentally appropriate curriculum and a "process approach" to instruction. Concurrently, they work to develop a belief system that reflects current research on the principles of student learning and child development.

Essential to the administrator's role is the responsibility to establish trust between all members of the school community. Children are trusted to allow their interests and needs to dictate the course of their curriculum. Teachers are trusted to recognize student needs and plan appropriately. Administrators and teachers then work to build trust with parents and community members. This happens by articulating the school philosophy based on the developmental needs of their children. Every person in the school works together to foster individual growth as well as to improve the climate of the entire school.

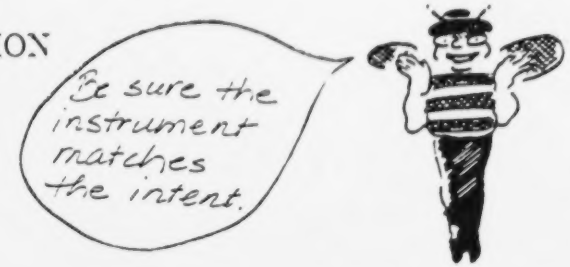
Administrators have a significant role in supporting this process, particularly with parents and community members. As educators move toward developmentally appropriate curriculum, administrators and teachers will need to clearly communicate to parents what changes will occur in the student's program and how they can become an integral part of the life of the school.

A climate of mutual trust encourages teachers to recognize their own professional needs and to set related goals. The administrator facilitates teacher growth by offering assistance, resources and support.

ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

Requires planbooks to clearly identify approved curriculum objectives, with prescribed time for each subject area.	Teacher is trusted to provide plans for broader goals, allows for time flexibility.	Encourages teachers to plan together and use observation and evaluation of children to guide next steps in planning.	Enables staff to plan together, to share ideas and resources and to observe each other's classrooms.
Views role as monitor of preset curriculum.	Encourages teacher to enhance adopted curriculum by incorporating the interests of children.	The teacher and administrator establish goals which allow flexibility for planning classroom activities by the teacher and students.	
Teacher evaluation is based on established criteria with little or no teacher input.	A committee of teachers and administrators develop criteria and process for evaluation.	Criteria is adapted to meet individual needs of teacher.	Teacher evaluation provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to develop together goals and objectives that are appropriate.
Administrative staff plans and implements inservice programs.	Staff development team utilize teacher input to determine subjects for inservice.	All school personnel plan and implement inservice and staff development programs based on their needs.	
Administrator sets climate for the school by establishing/monitoring rules.	Teachers and administrators work together to establish positive school climate.	The school community including children help with determining and monitoring rules.	

EVALUATION



In evaluating the progress of students in any program, the first step is to determine the purpose for the evaluation, so that the instruments selected, or developed, match the intent. Testing should not become a system of "sorting and stratifying", (Lezotte, 1988) encouraging labels to be attached to students. This labelling is often followed by prescriptive teaching methods which can be the same techniques that failed the child initially, but are now administered with more intensity. Instead, testing results should help educators adapt instruction to ensure the success of every student. "The assessment of students' understanding of concepts should be sensitive to the developmental nature of concept acquisition." (Romberg, et al., 1987)

Since developmentally appropriate programs focus on the whole child, evaluation could include the use of many different tools:

- measures of self-esteem
- attitudinal surveys of teachers, parents, students, and administrators
- interviews with students
- teacher observation of student performance
- anecdotal records
- log books
- checklists
- inventories
- portfolios
- demonstrations
- performances

One example of a developmental approach to testing at the state level is the Maine Educational Assessment, mandated by the Legislature as part of the Education Reform Act of 1984. It is administered during the fourth, eighth and eleventh grades. Although the MEA yields individual scores, the purpose is to assist districts with curricular and program evaluation, and to provide information to schools about learning process as well as content. Some examples of test items designed to do this are:

1. Open-ended questions in reading and math which examine the process by which the child works out the solution to the problem as well as the conclusion reached.

2. Performance-based prompts for writing are open-ended, and writing samples are scored individually by a host of trained Maine educators - an enormous commitment and an impressive feat.

3. Item selection is not necessarily based on the performance of what children have been taught to do but reflects their conceptual knowledge.

It is as important to look at the thought processes the student uses to solve the problem as it is to score the answer. This information helps us to determine the developmental level of the child.

The assumption underlying group standardized testing is that children should be measured against the norms of the age group, inferring that all children are at the same developmental level at the same time. We need to question these assumptions in light of our understanding of how children learn and develop. Group standardized testing may not be appropriate for primary children while they are in the preoperational stages. A more appropriate place for such testing would be at the fourth grade when they are solid concrete thinkers.

MEA designers stress that this instrument is only one tool in an evaluation process. They support the concept that developmentally appropriate classroom practices contribute to the success of children.

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